



December 5, 2018

**Via Online Submission**

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105/National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Secretary Dortch:

United Ways of California appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In California, our 31 local United Ways fight for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community, providing 2-1-1 information and referral services plays a central role in our efforts. California United Ways operate 2-1-1 programs serving 19 counties, and financially support 2-1-1 programs serving an additional 20 counties, available to 98% of California residents, and serving approximately 3 million people of all income levels, languages and cultural backgrounds each year with services such as suicide prevention, domestic violence resources, rent and mortgage assistance, food and shelter, healthcare, job training, transportation, childcare, and senior care.

Through our 2-1-1 work and our other community impact efforts, we know additional efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence.

We also know that ease of contacting assistance is a critical factor for people in crisis and friends, family and community members seeking to help. We believe that strengthening links between 2-1-1 and crisis helplines may be the most effective approach. I recently talked with Contra Costa Crisis Center Executive Director Tom Tamura, the Crisis Center has the dual mission of preventing suicide and providing 2-1-1 information and referral services, in preparing for recent testimony to our state's Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission about suicide prevention.

Tom Tamura also shared with me that when he started at his organization, he moved them from using several different 10-digit helpline numbers on their informational materials and website to listing 2-1-1 as the sole number to contact for help. He also emphasized the need to connect people in crisis to community resources beyond reaching a trained prevention specialist, for which 2-1-1 programs are best suited. He also suggested that in communities where different organizations provide 2-1-1 services and

suicide prevention, as is usually the case, there needs to be a good working relationship between the two, and better yet, an agreement and practice of using 2-1-1 as a simple, easy-to-remember way for people in crisis and those assisting them to reach out for help.

Creating another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and that strong partnerships between 2-1-1 providers and suicide prevention programs will be a valuable asset in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at [www.unitedwaysca.org](http://www.unitedwaysca.org) and [www.unitedwaysca.org/our-work/2-1-1-resources](http://www.unitedwaysca.org/our-work/2-1-1-resources), and can reach our office for additional questions or discussion at 877-355-8922. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very truly yours,



Peter Manzo  
President and CEO